



McGee Ranch/ Riverlands Unit

Fact Sheet • August 2002



FWS photo: David Goeke

Unit Size

9,000 acres

History and Administration

Since 1943 the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has held title to the lands that make up this and all other units that became part of the Hanford Reach National Monument in 2000. DOE currently retains primary land management responsibility of this unit.



FWS photo: Kathy Criddle

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Location

Unit boundaries include the Columbia River to the north, State Highway 24 on the east and south to Cold Creek, where the western boundary stair-steps north back to the Columbia River. Prominent features include the eastern end of Umtanum Ridge, China Bar, and the Hanford Reach.

Habitats

This unit provides a corridor of protected habitat for wildlife to travel between the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve Unit and the Saddle Mountain and Wahluke Units of the Monument. It also provides a critical link of connectivity to the Yakima Training Center to the west. Deep soil areas on the north slope of Umtanum Ridge have big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass community. Shallow alkaline vernal pools occur on the east end of Umtanum Ridge on basalt shelves and dips that formed internal drainages. The ridge also supports unique lithosol (rocky shallow soil) plant communities that include purple sage, prickly phlox, rock and thyme buckwheat.

Rare Plants

This unit is home to rare plants including Hoover's desert parsley, Kittitas larkspur, and Umtanum Ridge desert buckwheat - a federal candidate species found nowhere else in the world.

Wildlife

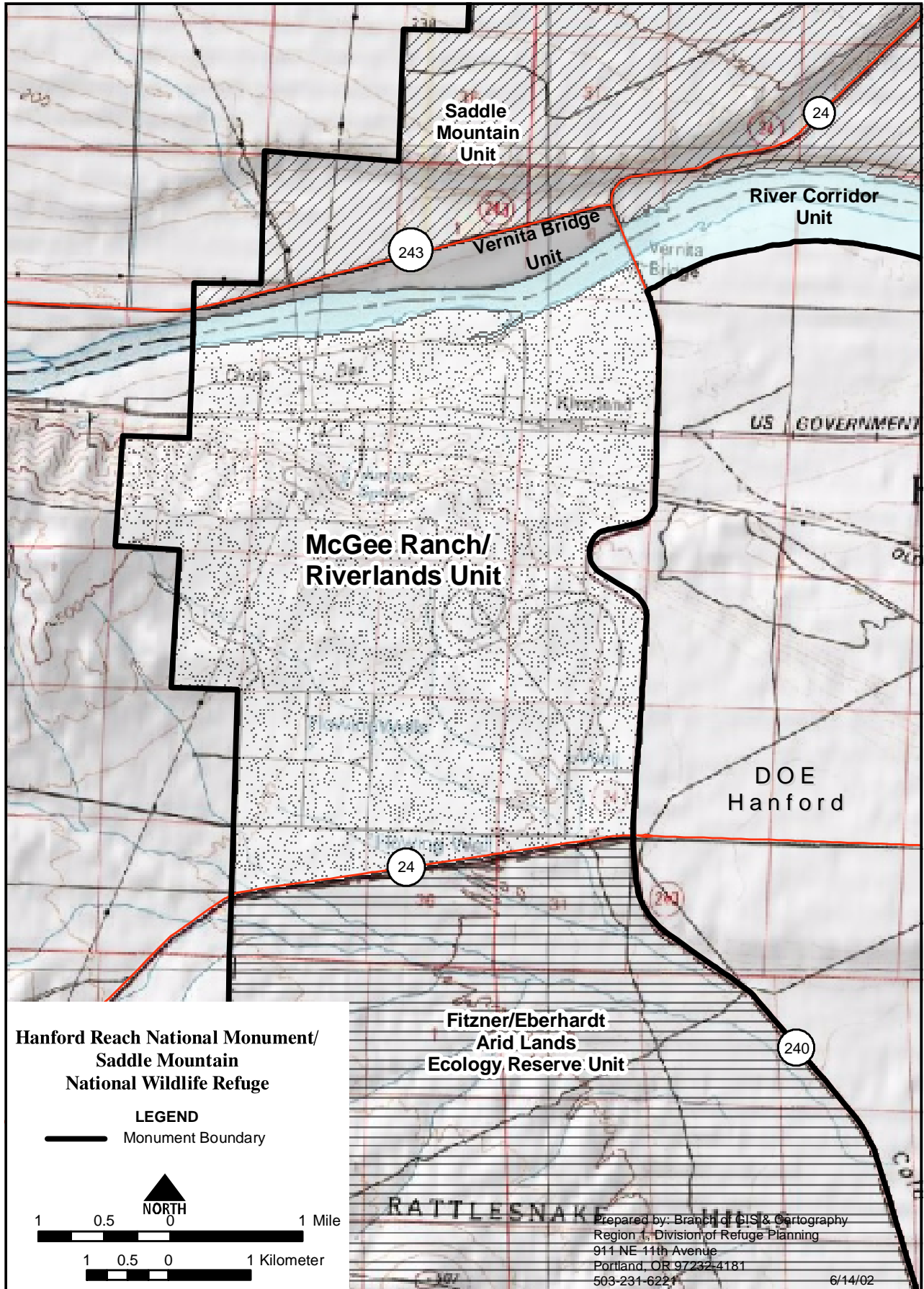
Umtanum ridge contains rock outcrops that attract rock and canyon wrens, cliff swallows and white-throated swifts. Shrub stands support lark and sage sparrows. Long-eared owls occasionally roost in trees that remain from abandoned homesteads. An alkaline spring on Umtanum Ridge supports an endemic snail not known from any other location. Umtanum Ridge and the shorelines of the Columbia River appear to support a wide variety of butterflies, including several rare species. Fall Chinook salmon spawn along the Vernita bar.

Public Uses

Day use is permitted between Midway Road and the Columbia River only. Primary activities include bank fishing and boat launching at a primitive cobblestone ramp area. The Washington Department of Transportation maintains a rest stop and picnic area off State Highway 24 just south of the River in this unit.

Cultural Resources

Camp sites and artifacts found in this unit suggest early Native American occupation ranging from about 4000 to 2500 years ago. Many archeological sites are associated with the same springs that attracted homesteaders to the area around 1900. The availability of artesian water led to the establishment of an extensive gravity flow irrigation system. By the Depression, many of the ranches were abandoned due to limited irrigation capabilities.



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